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By NICHOLAS HUBA

STAFFORD - Rep. John Adler said Monday he will request money for the reconstruction of the causeway bridge that connects Manahawkin and Long Beach Island in the next round of funding for road reconstruction.

Adler, D-N.J., made the comments during the Ocean County Mayors' Association Meeting at the Holiday Inn.

"We are committed to trying to get this project done," Adler said. "This is a project that is important to the whole county."

The mile-long causeway bridge system is composed of four bridges that link three small islands between the mainland and Long Beach Island.

The longest span, officially named the Dorland J. Henderson Memorial Bridge, links Bonnet Island and a sliver of marshland just off the mainland's shore in Manahawkin Bay.

In 2004, the state concluded the Manahawkin Bay Bridge was safe - but in "poor structural condition" - and needed to be either extensively refurbished or entirely rebuilt.

The state Department of Transportation considered several options, made a number of site visits and met with local officials during the past few months.

Construction on the project is expected to start in 2012, officials said.

Adler and other representatives of the area met with Gov. Jon Corzine about a month ago to talk about a variety of issues including the future of the bridge project.

"The state said that they are going to shorten the permitting process from three years to two years," Adler said. "You (mayors) have to keep on top of it. The federal government moves slowly, but this is a project that we are going to be on top of."

Ship Bottom Mayor William Huelsenbeck said there is no reason that the permitting process

should take that long.

"Cutting it to two years," Huelsenbeck said. "I don't think the permitting process needs to take that long."

Stafford Township Mayor Carl W. Block said the a finished project is almost a decade away.

"The building of a new bridge and the repairs to the current one will not be totally completed until 2019 at the earliest," Block said.

"That is a decade away and a lot can happen between now and a decade, but we are all committed to getting this project completed," he added.

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